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THE PLEA OF NECESSITY.

"Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth."
Romans 14th, 22d.

It is a lamentable fact that, while the opponents of slavery are numerous, both in the United States and in Europe, and while we feel encouraged in believing that the number of those who are convinced of its inconsistency with the obligations of pure Christianity is on the increase, yet, amongst this large number, there are so few who feel concerned to carry out their principles against this appalling system of oppression, to the disuse of its products — the purchase and consumption of which we believe to be the foundation and mainspring of the whole system of slavery.

The proposition that it is the demand for slave produce which sustains slavery is so clear and forcible, that argument against it is soon exhausted, and those who undertake to oppose the principle of abstinence, are uniformly driven to frame some collateral excuse for an indulgence in the fruits of oppression and unrighteousness. Of these excuses stands most conspicuous the *Plea of Necessity*.

"Abstinence from slave produce is impracticable." "The advocates for the measure are necessarily inconsistent." "Total abstinence from slave products in a country like ours is an impossibility, unless you betake yourselves to the woods and live on roots and berries." Such is the language of the pleaders for the necessity of using the products of slavery;

and from the boldness with which it is advanced, and the pertinacity with which it is adhered to, it is calculated to strike dismay into the heart of the sober and honest inquirer into the truth of these things at the outset; giving, perhaps, a quietus to his awakening conscience, and inducing him to relinquish the farther pursuit as unavailing.

It is also much to be regretted that many, even of those who believe that abstinence from the use of slave products is called for at the hands of the sincere opponents of slavery, have, to too great an extent, admitted the weight of this plea of necessity; thus weakening their own efforts, and throwing discouragement on the cause itself. Whenever we suffer ourselves to tamper with an enemy, we give him the advantage. "Get thee behind me Satan," is the only sure way to overcome the enemies of righteousness.

On these accounts, it seems desirable that the plea of necessity should meet with a closer and more rigid examination than has yet been accorded to it, seeing that it is one of the main obstacles in the way of the free produce movement.

The opponents of slavery have been called, in derision, "*men of one idea.*" And the advocates for rendering this opposition consistent, by refusing to partake of the products of that system which they are aiming to overthrow, have been stigmatised, even by some who profess anti-slavery principles, as persons who entertain but a *fragment* of the "one idea." Such have obviously taken but a very superficial view of the subject. A short examination will prove their conclusions in this matter to be erroneous.

It were absurd to suppose that they who have thus been made willing to undergo the abridgement of the comforts and conveniences, not to say the luxuries of life, and to make the sacrifices of a pecuniary nature, which are expected to be the consequence of an adherence to principle in abstaining from the products of slave labor, are not at the same time thoroughly imbued with a deep and abiding sense of the iniquity of the practice of enslaving and reducing to the condition of beasts their fellow man; heir with themselves of an eternity of weal or woe. Neither can it be supposed that

such abstinent would not be ready at all times to lend whatever aid might be in their power to any consistent, moral efforts, for the restoration of the enslaved to the dignity of manhood. So far, then, from the advocates of abstinence from slave produce entertaining but the fragment of the one idea, their sincere adoption of this principle is evidence of their having embraced the anti-slavery sentiment in all its power and virtue.

From what has been advanced, it would be evidently useless to address an argument in favor of abstinence from slave produce to any that are not fully convinced of the wrong and sinfulness of slavery itself. It is therefore to the members of the Society of Friends, a Christian body which has engrafted the anti-slavery principle into its religious organization, as well as to all sincere, conscientious opponents of slavery, of every rank, denomination and country, that I particularly address myself, in this humble attempt to turn their attention to an investigation of this universal plea of necessity.

Before proceeding to an examination in detail of the articles, the use of which is deemed so necessary as to conflict with a consistent testimony against slavery, I may take occasion to express my decided impression that this plea of necessity, for the indiscriminate use of the products of the slaves' toil, will prove too much for many of those who advance and defend it. For if it be admitted that it is necessary that we should make use of articles, the production of slave labor, then the necessity must be equally great, that there should be slaves to produce them. And the slaveholder, whom we may allow to be the best judge of the means of producing those articles to his own and the consumer's advantage, will have reason to thank the authors of this argument. For he may readily respond that, without slaves, he could not supply the demand for these products, nor afford them at so low a price. Therefore, the use of these products being admitted to be necessary, the slaveholder will feel justified in his practice.

But we may pursue this train a little farther. When the consumption of slave products becomes so great that the pre-

sent number of slaves, with the utmost coercion, are not able to supply the demand, their number must then, under the same necessity, be increased, and the northern slave States, or the coast of Africa, as the case may be, must be resorted to for a supply; the internal slave trade of the United States, and the foreign slave trade with the coast of Africa, with all their accumulated barbarities and crimes, being by these means stimulated into action. Any one who will examine into the progressive increase which has taken place in the consumption and production of the great staples of slaveholding countries, will perceive that the very effects here described have been produced.

Hence it must be conceded, that the plea of necessity, when carried out to its legitimate results, lays waste our professed principles against slavery and the slave-trade, and conduces to sustain them both. We must, therefore, either escape the force of this plea, or compromise, if we do not wholly abandon, our position as opponents of the system of slavery.

Under this aspect of the case, the question of the necessary use of slave produce assumes an increasing importance, involving, as it appears to do, our testimony against slavery itself.

What, then, shall we do? Is there any way of escape from this dilemma? or are the professed opponents of slavery, those who deeply feel and deplore the wrongs of the slave, bound by inexorable circumstances to compromise their feelings and principles on this important question, and to rank themselves on the side of the supporters and abettors of slavery?

Notwithstanding the positive manner in which the impracticability of abstaining from the products of the coerced and unrequited toil of the slave may have been proclaimed, I believe it can be shown that there is no insurmountable necessity for compromising our testimony against this crying iniquity by an indiscriminate participation in its unrighteous gains. At the same time, I do not feel that it will be required in this connection, to enter into any profound metaphysical investigation of the question, how far any individual is

bound, in support of correct principle, to abstain from things which are necessary to his existence. The question before us is a practical one, and as such I shall endeavor to treat it, believing that with some exercise of self denial, which is one of the Christian graces, it is possible to clear our hands of the products of slavery so far that our sincere endeavors, if carried out in faith and patience, will be accepted in the Divine Sight, and our consciences absolved of any participation in the support of the slave system.

In order to make this appear it will be necessary to take a separate view of the articles of slave production which enter into general consumption, and which, being by some treated as necessities of life, are consequently comprised in the plea of necessity. These are but five in number, viz: Cotton, Coffee, Sugar, Rice and Tobacco.

Cotton, the first named of these, may be considered the most important item, because it is the most intimately blended with the interests and convenience of all classes of society; and because it is the mainstay of slavery in the United States. I am well aware that in attacking the use of slave grown cotton, I meet with an antagonist, even among non-slaveholders, whose "name is Legion," in the persons of the merchants and manufacturers as well as the consumers. And I know that the opposition of the two former classes, although fewer in number, will be more intense and more difficult to overcome than the latter, because while the interest of the consumer amounts individually to a trifle, that of the merchant and manufacturer will be represented by thousands and tens of thousands.

Is it then surprising to hear echoed and re-echoed from all quarters, we must have cotton? Whether free grown or slave grown, there is no alternative. How can we do without cotton?

To this it may be answered. There was a time within the memory of many now living, before the inventions of Arkwright and Whitney, when in Europe and America the articles of cotton was scarcely known or used.

About the close of the Revolutionary War the first experiments were made to raise cotton in the United States. In

the early part of the year 1785 one bale of cotton, the produce of the United States, was landed in England. In 1786 the whole export from America amounted to 900 pounds, and from that day the crop of the United States has increased until in 1848-9 it reached the enormous amount of 2,700,000 bales, and with that increase has been more and more firmly rivited the chain of the American slave.

How did the people live without cotton in those days? or with so little of it? At all events, we know that they did do it. This fact proves its possibility, and removes all doubt that every conscientious opposer of slavery might likewise abstain from the use of it at the present day, if they believed it essential to render their testimony consistent. For it cannot be supposed that mankind in the present enlightened and scientific age, would be less ingenious in contriving substitutes for cotton goods, than our predecessors were before that commodity came into common use.

But the conscientious abstainer from slave produce is not bound wholly to deny himself the use of cotton. There is at this time a large quantity of free labor cotton produced in different parts of the world. That production is increasing, and if all those who are, and may become convinced of the iniquity of slavery, will be true to their principles and use none but free grown cotton, it will increase to an indefinite extent with the demand, until there will not be a pound of slave labor cotton grown in the world.

The great mass of the free labor cotton at present produced is unavailable, as such, on account of its being indiscriminately mixed with the slave grown article. Here then is a wide field in which the conscientious Christian and consistent philanthropist may labor for the cause of truth, and suffering humanity. What an encouragement is here presented to the sincere opponent of slavery to seek out, and at the trifling expense of keeping it separate until it is ready for the consumer, to ensure an immediate supply of cotton goods uncontaminated with the gains of oppression.

The next article on our list is coffee, the use of which has become almost as extensive as cotton, and which has likewise

had its influence in extending and consolidating slavery and the slave trade in the countries where it is produced.

The question then arises : Is coffee a necessary of life ? The number of individuals is not few nor unimportant who are becoming convinced that, so far from coffee being a necessary, its use in the manner and to the extent which now prevails, is highly deleterious to health. And here I may express my own conviction, founded on some degree of experience, that entire abstinence from the use of coffee would materially advance the health and happiness of the human race. At any rate, it may be safely asserted that an amount of it which would be compatible with a moderate and wholesome use of this beverage, could be obtained at once the product of free labor.

The third article is sugar, which for all necessary purposes can be obtained the product of free labor, and that product would undoubtedly increase with the demand. Yet if the consumption of sugar should be materially diminished by confining ourselves to the use of that which is clear of slavery, no one I presume will contend that the community would suffer any real disadvantage on that account.

Rice, the fourth article, can be classed only as a luxury. Few, if any, families make a daily use of it, or consider it a necessary of life. Therefore its use can add no weight to the plea of necessity, and beside, the present limited supply furnished by free labor, would, as in the case of cotton, be increased to meet any increase of demand.

Tobacco is the last of my list of slave grown commodities which enter into the general consumption. what shall I say of tobacco ? It is a subject I scarcely know how to treat, consonant with my own feelings, and with that respect and condescension which are due to the characters of many valuable individuals, who appear as though they considered it a necessary, a luxury, and a blessing. I must, however, claim the freedom to say, that those persons are, by the weight of their example, giving their sanction to the use of an article, which, in the estimation of a respectable portion of mankind, is deemed no better than a nuisance ; and not only so, but that its use in a general sense, more particularly by young

men and boys, is destructive alike to health and cleanliness, and dangerous to the moral feelings.

I rejoice in the belief that this sentiment is gaining ground, and I trust it will extend untill the use of tobacco in any form, as a stimulant to the human system, shall be entirely abandoned. Then the moral feelings of conscientious men and women will no longer be put to the test of being tempted to sacrifice their testimony against slavery, for the sake of indulging their appetites in the use of this loathsome narcotic.

I ask any fair and candied opponent of abstinence, after an impartial consideration of the foregoing exposition, to say in what particular there is any insurmountable necessity for partaking of any of the articles enumerated when produced by slave labor. The only necessity which I can conceive lies in the indulgence of our vanity in dress or equipage, or in the gratification of our sensual appetites with food which in many cases is not convenient for us. Whether an indulgence in these things will continue to be considered so necessary as to close the eyes and the ears and the hearts of those who would willingly shelter themselves under this plea, against the glaring truth that it is the demand for slave products which supports slavery, is a question which I trust they will deeply ponder in the secret of their own hearts, and be enabled to decide according to the dictates of immutable Truth.

Perhaps some anti-slavery man, anxious to escape the reproof of conscience, and yet unwilling to abandon the use of slave products, will say that the list of articles already named is incomplete; that there are yet other slave produced commodities, which are in general use and cannot be dispensed with.

This had not escaped my notice, and being fully disposed to give this important question a fair examination, I now proceed to examine one or two other articles, which stand in a somewhat different relation to the subject from those which I have already enumerated. These are paper, and the precious metals.

It has been declared, with perhaps some degree of exultation, that "he who takes a bank note, violates the principle

of abstinence." Persons who thus declaim, appear not to be aware of the fact that cotton is not a suitable material for bank note paper, and does not enter usually, if at all, into its composition.

Books and paper, I readily concede to be articles of necessity, which mankind at the present day could not dispense with. It must also be admitted that a large proportion of cotton is used in the manufacture of paper, which, at first view, presents difficulties of no common moment; yet a little deeper insight into the matter being taken, I think it will appear that the use of these articles conflicts little, if at all, with the general principle we have been advocating.

It is well known that the rags and refuse cotton which enter into the manufacture of paper, are fit for no other purpose, and if these materials were not put to that use, they would be swept into the gutter or otherwise destroyed as worthless. The rags and cast off garments of the household are generally bestowed on any one who will undertake the labor of collecting and preparing them for sale; and in numerous families they are not considered worth the trouble of preserving. Hence we may infer that very little if any of the *value* of the refuse cotton that enters into the composition of paper goes to the slaveholder, or belongs to the slave.

If this view of the case be correct, and I think it cannot be controverted, then the use of paper and books does not conflict with the principle which forbids us to be partakers in the gain of oppression.

Gold and silver are used in two different modes which are very distinct from each other, one of which is coin; the other, utensils, ornaments of dress, &c. The latter are merely luxuries, and when made use of by the consistent opponents of slavery, they should be careful to have them composed of such silver or gold as they have good reason to believe is clear of slavery. There would be no difficulty in obtaining materials of that description, as a large proportion of the precious metals are now procured in countries where no slavery exists. The plea of necessity can therefore in no wise bear upon gold or silver plate, jewelry, or other articles composed wholly or in part of those metals.

Come we then at last to coin. The love of money has been called the root of all evil, and in the case before us it appears that money itself is so closely connected with evil that it may be considered as inseparable from it.

Legal coin is made exclusively under the direction of governments; and until public opinion generally can be brought to embrace this testimony, we cannot expect governments to be very discriminating in the sources whence the metals composing their coins, are obtained. Hence, as we cannot perform the common and necessary transactions of life without it, we must take such coin as we find in circulation. Yet there are some essential points of difference between gold and silver coin, and the articles of cotton, sugar, coffee, &c. It cannot be shown, that for the purpose of mining gold and silver, slavery is at the present day sustained in any part of the world. And the proportion of that which is obtained through free labor is so great, that no person can point to any one legally issued coin, and unqualifiedly declare it to be the product of slave labor.

We have then narrowed down the plea of necessity to a fraction of the metal which enters into the composition of gold and silver coin.

If, then, they who believe it incumbent upon the consistent opponents of slavery, to adopt the principles of abstinence from the use of slave products, feel that when they have done what they can, they are bound in humility to crave indulgence, in that they are "necessarily inconsistent," even though it be but in one small point, what must be the situation of those who are *unnecessarily* inconsistent — some of whom make broad professions of hostility to slavery, as a crime of the deepest dye, and yet freely use those things that are not only known to be the unrighteous fruits of oppression, but the consumation of which undeniably gives life and energy to the slave system?

One argument remains to be considered in relation to the question of necessity, and I shall bring these remarks to a close.

Free labor goods cost more, it is said, than those produced by slaves, and the mass of the people cannot afford to

buy them. Such is the argument predicated on the difference between the price of free and slave labor goods. Although this difference is sometimes very small, and it will doubtless be diminished as the market for free goods enlarges, yet it is admitted that there is, in some cases, at the present time, a difference in price against the free labor article ; and it is to be feared that this forms, in most minds, the very foundation of their objections to the use of free labor products. Not only with those who are really unable to afford any addition to their family expenses, but even with others who can have no conceivable motive, but their love for the mammon of unrighteousness.

But praise be to Him who hath cast up a way for the righteous to walk in, "where no lion shall be, nor any ravenous beast go up therein ;" there is no necessity even for those in the humbler walks of life to become the accomplices of the men of blood in their nefarious deeds. If twenty-five or thirty years ago, the people could clothe and feed themselves and their families, when coffee, sugar and cotton goods were sold at three or four times the present price of free labor articles of the same kind, most assuredly they can have no excuse now for the use of slave goods on account of the difference in the price.

It is matter for the most profound regret and humiliation, that a system, by which millions of our fellow beings are not only deprived of their personal liberty and of every blessing which accompanies it, but are plundered of the products of their toil, under circumstances of the greatest hardship and privation, has yet been entertained and nurtured in the bosom of civilized and Christian communities, and has become interwoven with the commercial relations of the world, to such an extent, that moral turpitude of a connection with it, on which its very existence depends, is so far overlooked, that it is laid down as a grave and positive argument — that, because slave products are cheaper than free, their use is necessary to the great mass of mankind. Alas, where is our morality ? where is our standard of Christian rectitude ? By what rule do those measure their actions who ask us to rely on such an argument as this ? What is there in this

mode of reasoning that would not as conclusively justify us in an indiscriminate use of any other kind of stolen goods whatever, seeing it is only necessary we should say that we could not afford to pay the price of such goods when honestly obtained, and justly paid for? Let all these look well to their motives, and "spurn the bribe."

In conclusion, let me earnestly entreat every one whose desire it is that righteousness shall be exalted in the earth, to give the question of abstinence from partaking of the products of slave labor, a close and impartial examination, and not to shrink from the manifestations of that light, which would unfold to them the path of duty and point them to their obligation to walk in it; however narrow that path may appear to be, or whatever sacrifice it may cost of the goodly things of this life. Remembering the injunction of Him who is our law-giver and will be our judge, — "strive to enter in at the straight gate," because "straight is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life." Let us beware of putting our trust in such a broken reed as the plea of necessity for our vindication in the day of account, when the startling question shall be put to us, "Where is Abel thy brother?" "What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." May all hasten, ere it be too late, to obey the voice from Heaven heard by the apocalyptic prophet, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues, for her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities."

MOUNTPLEASANT, O HO:
STEREOTYPED AND PRINTED,
BY ENOCH HARRIS.
